

National Security Bureau

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Speech by the President of Poland at the 77th session of the UN General Assembly

This is not a regional conflict: it is a stake of global fire, this war will bear on our countries and yours. Unless it has already happened, President Andrzej Duda said in New York.

Honorable Mr. Secretary General,

Your Excellency, Distinguished Mr. President,

Excellencies, Distinguished Heads of States, Nations and Governments,

Esteemed Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

One year ago, I was delivering my speech at this very place as a president of a country of 38 million people. Today, I am standing on the rostrum with the awareness that in my country, in Poland, according to various statistics, more than 40 and, according to some voices, even 41 million people are living. The additional two or even three million of people are predominantly our neighbors: refugees from Ukraine. Some of the are our permanent guests, others are travelling back and forth between Poland and Ukraine, but they have one common denominator: they all seek in our country protection from war, from death, from captivity amidst Russian occupation, in the wake of Russian assault on Ukraine.

The war, going on for seven months, was unleashed by the Russian invasion is a war where Russia is not limiting itself to fighting the Ukrainian army. Russian troops kill civilians or forcibly relocate them to their territory. They destroy Ukrainian cities, Ukrainian monuments, schools, kindergartens, hospitals. They destroy agricultural crops and devastate natural environment. They destroy literally everything they cannot seize or loot. As of recently, they have been going as far as to threaten not only Ukraine, but the whole world, and for the most part Europe, with causing a nuclear catastrophe, this by launching nuclear attacks and causing disruptions in nuclear plants, the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Station in the first place.

The decision to wage this war was made by people in Russian prompted by imperial sentiment and colonial, nationalist hubris – exalting their own people and denying the right of to self-determination to their sovereign neighbors. They managed to obsess the nation of one of the UN's founding states with this thought. A nation that had a chance to protest against the insanity of its leaders. Unfortunately, only a few among Russians, those most courageous, stood up against this war. They dared to stand on the side of justice and honesty.

Honorable Secretary General!

Ladies and Gentlemen!

This war, the war started by Russia in Ukraine, like all other conflicts going on in the world today, must be lost by the aggressor, and in this case it is, I reiterate, the Russian state. More than that: the aggressor in a sense has

already lost, because it failed to subdue a free nation, to break Ukrainian people's spirit, to disperse its army. Today the aggressor has against it not the Ukrainian state itself, but a nation of many millions, the vast majority of whom do not want any negotiations with the invader until he withdraws its troops from Ukraine's occupied territories. It is at odds with a large part of the nations of the world, who have spoken their minds very clearly, also in the resolutions adopted in this fold; it is at odds with my own country, Poland, the country whom, I am stressing the point emphatically, Ukraine can always count on.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

I was one of those politicians who, even before the war, believed that Ukraine would successfully defend itself. Today I am convinced that it will prevail, that the refugees will return to their homes, that Ukraine will be rebuilt, that its internationally recognized borders will be restored. My country, Poland, joining forces with its Allies, will do its utmost to make this happen.

But there are other facets to this war: it has economic repercussions in many areas. A parallel war unleashed by Russia, the war against our common principles and values, against all of humanity. And I also want to talk about humanity today, because I see representatives of many familiar countries from Africa, the Middle East and Asia in this hall, the countries whose leaders I spoke with just before or during the war.

This is not a regional conflict: it is not a Russia's war against Ukraine, it is a hotbed of global fire, this war will bear on our countries and yours. Unless it has already happened.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

One of the most dramatic global effects of the Russian aggression is food crisis and the specter of famine looming over large parts of the world.

I have had lengthy discussions on the subject during my recent journey to countries of West Africa: Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal. In all those countries I have spoken with their leaders about food security and potential impacts of further restrictions on exports of grain and fertilizers from Ukraine and Russia. The topic featured also in previous discussions we had together with fellow presidents from Central and Eastern Europe as we spoke with the leaders from Africa, Middle East and Asia.

I vividly recall a late-night consultation in Rzeszow we had together with UN Secretary General Mr. Antonio Guterres who was on his way to Ukraine to address food-related problems there. Thank you, Sir, for your zeal, commitment, for your resolve and courage, Mr. Secretary General. These qualities were so important and still are to duly represent the international community which belongs to this Organization, the largest in the world.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

From the very beginning of the invasion, Russia has been deliberately and cynically destroying new crops and farming equipment, and the invasion itself has drastically reduced Ukrainian harvests. The data we have obtained makes it clear: Russia has seized farmland representing 22% of all agricultural land in Ukraine. One-fifth of the land that is the breadbasket of many non-European countries; the land which produces nearly 30% of winter crops are grown, has failed to produce any crops this season or its harvest has been looted. Speaking in this fold, I do not need to recall that Ukraine is one of the most important food producers in the world. It is a breadbasket not only of Europe, but also of the world.

Conservative estimates indicate that this year alone Ukraine's harvest will be 35% smaller in the aftermath of war. I emphasize, by THIRTY-FIVE percent smaller.

More than one-third of what has been the granary of large parts of the world has been eliminated by Russian aggression. Who will suffer from this? Those who are most in need. It is an economic weapon, it is weaponization of food hitting the hardest Africa and the Middle East. I have been in politics long enough not to be naïve on that count: this is a deliberate policy of Russia.

It is estimated that in the aftermath of war in Ukraine, the number of people suffering from chronic hunger this year will increase by about 47 million people. Again: especially in Africa and the Middle East. It is in those regions that the famine caused by Russia's assault of Ukraine will be most visible.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As an international community, we are obliged to prevent anyone in the 21st century from knowingly and cynically causing artificial famine in the name of achieving their political goals, the way Stalin did back in the 1930's. In this context, it is of key importance that on July 22, in Istanbul, Russia and Ukraine signed agreements with Turkey and the UN - aimed at unblocking the sea route through the Black Sea for the export of millions of tons of Ukrainian grain.

Personally, I would like to acknowledge once again the significant role played by the United Nations Secretary General Mr. Antonio Guterres in the conclusion of this accord. This great success in such a dire situation is a credit to the UN and its Secretary General.

Now we all have to guard the parties' compliance with the agreements and their commitments. I am all the more concerned by the ever more frequent statements from the Russian side, undermining the accord, as well as by acts deserving to be condemned in the strongest terms - such as the shelling of the Odessa seaport by the Russian army, which occurred less than 24 hours of the signing of the documents. As an international community, we must immediately respond to such incidents by imposing further sanctions and providing more aid packages to Ukraine which is defending itself.

For my part, I would like to assure you that Poland, together with its European Union partners, remains steadfastly committed to facilitating Ukrainian grain exports, also by land. We will go to great lengths to make sure those consignments reach those who are most in need, especially in Africa, Asia, South America and wherever grain helps to sustain human lives .

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Honorable Delegates,

In the face of Russia's unlawful actions, we should learn a lesson for the future. We should also keep in mind the provisions of the international law and the possibility of holding perpetrators accountable.

A number of regulations exists in international law on the protection of food resources and the natural environment during conflicts. Among others, one can cite the provisions of Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which recognizes the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger, and in which states pledged to distribute the world's food supplies equitably.

In addition, Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (June 8, 1977), in Article 54, prohibits, among other things, attacking, destroying, removing, or rendering useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as foodstuffs and agricultural zones. In turn, Article 55 of the Protocol obliges states to protect the natural environment from

damage during hostilities.

That Russia is deliberately destroying Ukraine's agriculture in breach of international law is probably no great surprise to anyone here. But in the face of a barbaric war, are international legal regulations a sufficient response to the enormity of the damage to the environment and the world's food supply? I have strong doubts about this.

It is in this context that I see the need to develop penalization mechanisms to able in the future to bring to justice the perpetrators responsible for violating international law.

Those who knowingly destroy crops in the "breadbasket of the world" must know that they will be pursued to be prosecuted as long as they live!

I would like from this place to pledge our support to all existing and new initiatives so that those who deprive millions of people of their right to food and destroy the environment will no longer go unpunished. Poland wants to actively participate in their work.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Honorable Delegates,

The Russian aggression on Ukraine constitutes no less than an aggression against the whole world. Each aggression requires a multidimensional international response, with determination and without hesitation. It is necessary to step-up the pressure on Russia and its accomplice: Alexander Lukashenko's regime in Belarus. Advisability of continuing cooperation with those governments should be deeply reassessed, also by international organizations.

There is no more room for „business as usual“ with Russia. The time of “business as usual” is definitely over. It was brought to an end by Russia's beastly aggression on Ukraine, by the breach of rules of international law, by the disrespect of man and human life.

I say this as a man who has been to Ukraine three times since the beginning of the war and who left Ukraine in a matter of hours before the aggression, who went to see the devastation of Borodyanka near Kyiv, who went to see the ruined houses in Irpen, who was there to see the anguish of civilian population and the results of Russia's brutal assault, who saw stains of blood on the asphalt where Russian soldiers opened fire at passenger cars with families fleeing the war. It is hardly imaginable. But, Esteemed Delegates, I saw all that with my own eyes, I saw the magnitude of that savagery and I know exactly what Russian aggression in Ukraine means, what is meant when Volodymyr Zelensky refers to Russian brutality and the toll of thousands of Ukrainian lives, of the people murdered by the Russians.

Today, standing before the UN General Assembly, I say this to you as a leader of the state who borders were crossed by almost 6 million Ukrainian refugees.

Our children go to schools together with the children of Ukrainian citizens who came to us to save their own lives.

Our citizens have taken to their homes hundreds of thousands of refugees. Yes, many of you, Ladies and Gentlemen, may find this hard to believe, but despite the fact that six million refugees from Ukraine have arrived in our country and, as we estimate, about two million are currently in Poland, we have not had to build any refugee camp. There was no such necessity. No one is living in Poland in tents, all of them have found decent shelter, in decent conditions and specially prepared places for them – in hotels, dormitories, other places of temporary residence. There are no tent fields in our country, where people lived, protecting themselves from the war. Everyone found decent accommodations.

Every Polish man and every Polish woman is familiar with the situation in Ukraine. Every Polish man and every Polish woman has it written in the memory of their family what Russian occupation means, what Russian attack on a state entails, what Russian terror means, because Polish families experienced this terror after World War II, when the Russians occupied Poland and when Poland found itself behind the Iron Curtain, and when patriots tried to throw off the Russian yoke and fight back, many people were thrown into prisons, murdered.

In 1939, right after Nazi Germany invaded Poland, it was Soviet Russia – by virtue of an agreement between Hitler and Stalin on August 23, 1939 – that invaded the Republic of Poland together with Nazi Germany and it was Soviet Russia that destroyed my country. Soviet Russia captured half of my country together with nearly two million people who were then deported to the far east, to deep Siberia. 22,000 Polish officers and police officers were brutally murdered by the Soviets, they were executed in Katyn, Mednoye, Kharkov and Tver.

We know what Russian terror and Russian occupation mean. That is why Poles spontaneously set off to help Ukrainian refugees without asking for anything, and the government and I – the President of the Republic of Poland – did not have to urge or appeal to them. People spontaneously went to the border to help and receive the Ukrainians, fleeing Russian aggression, receive them into their homes. This is our reality, the reality of Central Europe.

Mr. President, Distinguished Members of Delegations,

We must not forget those who are suffering. Let us remember that six months of Russian aggression in Ukraine has brought the biggest humanitarian crisis in Europe since World War II. I appeal for an increase in aid to the Ukrainian civilian population, whose humanitarian needs are far greater than the funds currently being provided.

Winter is approaching, which aggravated by the war and energy prices – will be the hardest winter in years. As humanity, we have no right to turn our backs on those most in need. We mustn't show any „war fatigue”, we must be supportive, ready to help.

We should work together on such a roadmap for economic and social development to give people hope that the world can be a better and more supportive place to live; in spite of being so scarred today by wars, the effects of pandemics and natural disasters. Poland wants to co-create such a program including here at the UN, for example as part of the work of the Economic and Social Council.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

Still, I owe a few words of truth to us – the leaders of the rich North, or – as others might like to put it – of the West.

It is very positive that we have risen to the challenge on the issue of Ukraine, that we have preserved our unity and rallied to support the victim, and not the aggressor. It is positive that today's Europe can distinguish who launched an attack on whom, can clearly see that Russia is the aggressor and Ukraine is suffering. It is good to have this clear undisputed distinction.

But let's not become complacent. My recent visit to Africa made me even more aware of something I had previously thought about for a long time myself.

Were we equally resolute during the tragedies of Syria, Libya, Yemen? Did we not return to business as usual after two great tragedies of the Democratic Republic of Congo, the wars in the Horn of Africa, and while condemning the invasion of Ukraine, do we give equal weight to fighting mercenaries who seek to destabilize the Sahel and threaten many other states in Africa?

This is how I see the lesson to be learnt from this war: if the United Nations is truly to be united, every response to violations of international law should be identical – decisive and principled. Because the world is a system of communicating vessels. Today the victim is Ukraine, but if Russian imperialism succeeds – then tomorrow it could be any country in the world. And crops will be plundered, and civilians turned out of doors or murdered in yet another country. We must not allow this to happen!

Poland's position in the face of any war is clear and straightforward: we demand absolute respect for internationally recognized national borders. The inviolability of these borders is the foundation of the world order and a condition for peace in any case. Today the victim is Ukraine. Tomorrow it could be any one of us if we do not follow these ironclad rules, if we do not ruthlessly enforce compliance with international law.

And let's not hide it: Russia owes Ukraine war reparations, which it will have to pay back. There is no justice without compensation. This applies to any country plundering another country. It applies today, but it also applies to unsettled issues from the past. I say this as the Polish President, the President of Poland, a country that was so terribly affected by World War II, which was overwhelmingly destroyed, which lost six million citizens, including three million Polish citizens of Jewish nationality.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Poland will continue its endeavors to hold Russia accountable for the violation of international law, on state and individual level. This war must be settled in such a way that the aggressor pays for the damage done, for the damage done, pays for every person murdered in Ukraine, pays for every house demolished, for every school, factory and hospital destroyed. This is necessary. Let's use all our powers and capabilities so that the guilty will be judged and punished. Let us use our powers to make sure that the guilty ones are judged and punished. To this end, we have started our cooperation with the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice in pursuit of the most effective ways of identifying and punishment of perpetrators.

Dear Mr. President,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On many occasions in its history, the free world has been facing partition wars caused by enemies of freedom, possessed by sick ambitions or the desire for total domination. From the genocidaires of the most ancient times to Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin and Pol Pot, the essence of these wars has not changed in any way. It always begins with a cult of strength and a belief in one's superiority – racial, class or ideological superiority over another human being – a person of another nationality, from another country or, sometimes, from their own nation, their own country.

However, man always pitched oneself against the aggressor and genocidaire. A free man. Aggression stirs in people the will to resist, courage, fortitude, solidarity and the desire to support the victims of injustice. And thus we continue to exist as humanity. I think this is an obligation derived not only from the harsh laws of politics. It lies at the very foundation of human nature, for, as Pericles put it in his famous Athenian funeral oration: „happiness is the fruit of freedom and freedom – of valor“. A man and a nation is able to pay any price for freedom and fight for it to the very end. Man has rebelled against slavery, colonialism, oppression, because it is his nature and his right, the inalienable right to freedom and respect of human dignity that every man enjoys.

For months, Ukraine has been exemplifying to us almost unbelievable valor. Therefore, in conclusion, I call on all of you from this place: let us not be indifferent to the heroism and full determination of the struggle for freedom. Let us never show indifference to any nation that defends itself against tyranny and contempt for humanity. For by doing so, it always defends all of humanity against such tyranny and contempt.

The vision of a world in which only naked power wins is not only wrong and immoral but can lead to a conflagration engulfing the entire world. I am convinced that on this occasion it is no different. And I say this in the forum of an organization that was formed in the wake of the greatest of such conflagrations. It was not without reason that in 1945 the leaders of our countries - the founding members of the UN - declared their intent to build a world based on dialogue, opposing the use of naked force.

Let us not forget this legacy. Let us not allow any tragedies to happen in the future, similar to those we experienced in the 20th century!

Thank you.

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